Transcript 'Nat' on ABC Adelaide Breakfast 07/04/21

[Ali Clarke] Now we're doing something a little bit different because yesterday we were inundated with people who were incredibly concerned with Nat. Now this is a woman who lives with a disability and we changed her name, and we altered her voice. And it was all part of a podcast that the disability advocacy group Purple Orange had got together. Now the reason why we were revisiting it yesterday was because it was one year on from the death of Ann Marie Smith. Now yesterday for those that missed it, because this happened after 830, we're just going to take you back there. And the reason that Nat was well, was so worried about being identified was because she told us that previously, when she has spoken up about the levels of care she's receiving from providers, she's been either dropped by provider, or has felt completely marginalised. Now Nat can't move her arms or legs. And she says she needs two people to move from her wheelchair to her bed. But often, when the carers turn up, there's one of them or maybe even they can't do the physical lifting, because they have things like a bad back, here's a little bit of net from yesterday.

[Nat from podcast tape] For over eight years, I've been sleeping most of the week in my wheelchair. And if my worker that can do it has to go away, I don't go to bed for however many days she's on leave. I'll say to him, "Ah, make sure the worker is aware that I'm going to be short and tired, because it's my third day my wheelchair."

"Yes. Okay".

"You get that though don't you?"

"Yeah, yeah. Okay. You haven't got out of your wheelchair/"

And I'm like, "For three days."

"Oh, why?"

"Because you haven't sent anybody?"

How do I get someone to do three hours of manual handling to get me out of bed?

And to constantly be told, a difficult, high need client?

They're not bad tears because I'm glad someone is listening and hearing. I just wish the right people would. It's all up and training. A lot of workers do not have any of the skills for high needs care. Why are they telling NDIS that they can look after people with high need care and take on our contracts, If they don't have the carers? And why aren't they doing something about it? They're getting the money. I thought it would change after Annie's tragedy. But it hasn't made a bit difference to anyone. They leave me in this position and go to bed every night.

[David Bevan] That was Nat as we played that audio to you yesterday and the person who brought us that audio was Robbi Williams, CEO of Purple Orange, which is a disability advocacy group. Robni Williams Good morning.

[Robbi Williams] Good morning, David.

[David Bevan] How's Nat today?

[Robbi Williams] I think she's probably the same as yesterday. So it's still wrangling her support each day to see if she's going to get a night's sleep out of it.

[David Bevan] Did anything come of the publicity that she received yesterday? Did anything come of the vigil yesterday?

[Robbi Williams] I think first of all, we're really grateful for the ABC's coverage of this issue yesterday. It's an important issue, of course, and people are rightly concerned about it. So we've been working closely with Nat and we assisted a confidential meeting between Nat and the National Disability Insurance Agency, who in a commencing review of that situation, so that it should include the availability of a planner who can meet face to face with Nat, and to review with her the situation. And we're hoping that will include a review of the amount of support coordination she's able to access to help her build her own team of workers with one trusted agency.

[Ali Clarke] It took a lot for Nat to speak out about this. And it obviously, you know, was in a form that you were pushing out there through Purple Orange, and then us here on the ABC. What about all those people that might be in a situation similar to Nat's that aren't getting media coverage?

[Robbi Williams] It's very hard for people to speak up. But it's, it's the only way to trigger positive change. So anyone who's listening, we would encourage people to reach out, contact their local advocacy agency if they're not sure who to go to contact us and we'll get people to the right organisation who can hear the story, and then advocate on their behalf. I should note Ali that some some of the reporting yesterday was saying that it was Purple Orange that were seeking state government funding for our own advocacy work. And that's not correct. We're seeking funding for those local agencies who do offer independent, individual advocacy, and do a good job. And the more resources that those agencies have, I think the quicker it will be that folk can get their issues represented, so the y can have their situation improved.

[David Bevan] So Robbi Williams from Purple Orange, following the publicity she received yesterday, there is specific bespoke attention being given to Nat by the by the people running the system. So the message here is there isn't a system to look after you that the message here is get on the radio and complain get somebody to put make a podcast for you. And then you'll get attention. That's that's the way the system works. Now.

[Robbi Williams] Well we would hope it isn't like that. And I know that, you know, when a large it is a large reform like the National Disability Insurance scheme that is being implemented in Australia, there are going to be issues along the way, that's not some kind of a sort of apologist approach to how this has played out for Nat to date. But I think the key the key issue is we don't expect agencies to get things right the first time, but we do expect them to respond quickly and to learn from their experiences. So we're staying connected with Nat throughout the next period of time to see how it travels with the NDIA and also with the Quality and Safeguarding Commission, we've also supported her to meet with. They're now reviewing the contact that she's previously had with them, and to confidentially examine the support issues that Nat has raised. And they want to approach Nat's providers with first checking with that, that's okay. Now, the reason we want to stay involved, David, is we want to look at Okay, what is the learning from this? And how can the NDIA and the quality and safeguarding commission evolve their practices so that other people in that situation don't have to go to the media to have their voices heard.

[Ali Clarke] Yesterday you said, Robbi Williams, you know, su rely and I think this is what we get from and have got from so many people on the texts line, isn't there a number? Isn't there just one port of call that people can go to and know that they will be treated respectfully and confidentially? And that is who they go to, to make it as simple and as easy as possible. And they will get looked after if their needs aren't being met in such horrendous fashion as this?

[Robbi Williams] Absolutely, I think so the National Disability Insurance Agency that runs the NDIS, there needs to be a 'No Wrong Door' approach, where there is a well publicised, accessible way that people can contact that agency and also the same for the Quality Safeguarding Commission. No, both of those ages may well say that they do have a 'No Wrong Door' approach. And, you know, a single accessible way of contacting those agencies. Now, I don't know if that's true. If it is true, it's clearly not publicised sufficiently for people to have confidence in it. So that might be one of the things that comes out of this for both those agencies as they redouble their efforts to make sure that everyone is involved with the scheme knows how they can contact those agencies confidentially to address their concerns.

[David Bevan] Robbi Williams, is there a role for the state government in this? Or is this entirely the responsibility of the federal government?

[Robbie Williams] There is a role for the state government. First of all, of course, South Australia tips in a fair bit of money into the National Disability Insurance Scheme. And so quite rightly, on behalf of all South Australians, including those living with disability, we need to make sure that the NDIS is bringing the value we might hope for for our citizens in South Australia. So this the the state government has a role in in pursuing that value. But it also has a role, I think, in making sure that people are supported to speak up. And there's a there's a great opportunity for the state government to look at how it can invest in independent individual advocacy, so that people can get help to have their voice heard.

[Ali Clarke] Because that was the final point that was made yesterday was that the seven recommendations that came out of the review into Ann Marie Smith's passing, none of these would have helped Nat's position that she finds herself in now.

[Robbi Williams] Not not through our examination of those issues. I mean, they were important recommendations, and they will help South Australians to better connect to the the supports that they may be entitled to under the NDIS, but in terms of the type of advocacy that someone like Nat needed assistance with the type of advocacy we hope could have reached. Ann Marie Smith. We're not confident those those recommendations that have been implemented, are going to meet those issues. They're an important first step, I think that the state government has taken to invest in ways that people can have their voices heard. But they're just the first step. And it does need to be a significant investment in how people can contact these independent advocacy agencies.

[David Bevan] Okay, so so so what do we do? Do we call you back next Monday and say, "Look, it's been about a week, has Nat's situation improved?" And then we'll call you back a week after that. And the powers that be know that every week for the next month, you'll get a call? Is that the way this works?

[Robbi Williams] You mean, you ring Purple, Orange?

[David Bevan] Yeah, we're ring you on behalf of our listeners. Because they want to make sure that Nat's being cared for, so we'll ring you every week, and touch base with you. And the powers that be who are providing these services, which are pretty crap to Nat. They'll know that every week Robbi Williams will be on ABC Radio Adelaide giving an update on her condition. How about that?

[Robbi Williams] Very happy to do that.

[David Bevan] All right, well talk to us anytime. So if something happens between now and then you just call us. But tell Nat that will ring next week. And the week after that. And we'll keep doing it until NAt is satisfied that something decent has been put in place permanently.

[Robbi Williams] That's, that's fantastic. I think that would be great. And I think Nat would value greatly that continued connection with her issues.

[Ali Clarke] Robbi Williams, CEO of Purple Orange, thank you. Thank you very much. Now of course, we asked again to speak with Michelle Lensink, the state disability minister, she was unavailable to talk on this issue today, directed us to the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission or the Federal Disability Minister who is Linda Reynolds now, now the Federal Disability Minister was also unavailable, but provided a statement which states that the NDIS commission officers have since met with Nat. We're currently working directly with her and the NDIA to address her issues. Now the NDIS Commission cannot comment further on individual matters.